DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 050 562 EM 008 922

AUTHOR Krippendorff, Sultana
TITLE A Re-examination of Mass Communications in an Underdeveloped Country Exemplified by India.
INSTITUTION Illinois Univ., Urbana.
PUB DATE Apr 71
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the International Communication Association Annual Conference (Phoenix, Arizona, April 22-24, 1971)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes, Beliefs, Communications, *Developing Nations, Industrialization, *Mass Media, Nationalism, Newspapers, Periodicals, *Political Socialization, *Publishing Industry, *Socioeconomic Influences, Technological Advancement
IDENTIFIERS *India

ABSTRACT

Mass communications are considered by many western scholars to be among the most potent tools for modernization of an underdeveloped country. This belief is based on two assumptions: that the mass media are large-scale operations which enjoy massive circulations or audiences and that they are primarily controlled by forward-looking, progressive governments and by people who share the governments' commitment to economic and political development. In the case of India, at least, these assumptions are false. Although broadcasting is controlled by the government, the popular press is composed of more than 10,000 newspapers and periodicals, and the major proportion of these publications consists of small publications with small circulations, stemming from small towns, written in one of the local vernacular dialects, and concerned with local more than national issues and themes. The vernacular press has also shown a general tendency to make steady gains over the English language press which is metropolitan based and may be said to be most concerned with national issues and events. As a result of these provincial loyalties and interests, it will be harder to use the mass media as instruments of progressivism and modernization than many western communications scholars suggest. (JK)

ED050562

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

A RE-EXAMINATION OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS IN AN UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRY EXEMPLIFIED BY INDIA

by Sultana Krippendorff

University of Illinois, Urbana

EM 008 922

International Communication Association
Phoenix, Arizona
April 22-24 1971

The study of the role of communications in the economic and political development of the third world is important for a number of reasons. Over the last decade a considerable amount of the effort of foreign aid missions as well as that of the governments of underdeveloped countries has been devoted to attempts to bring about desired social changes by consciously manipulating communications. The belief that development can be achieved through the instrumental use of communications has led to the tapping of the intellectual resources of scholars from a wide range of disciplines who have been called upon to consider the possible scope and limits of social engineering via communications. The pragmatic and intellectual concern with communications as an agent of social transformation has ensued in numerous articles and books in recent years. The cumulative effect of these has been to create an all-important place for the mass media which are seen to have immense consequences for bringing about economic and political development.

In view of this prevalent interest if becomes pertinent to examine the concepts of mass media which have been and continue to be developed by western scholars and to examine their appropriateness to underdeveloped situations. These concepts may be said to fall into two broad categories: (a) that the mass media are large-scale operations which enjoy massive circulations or audiences; (b) that they are primarily controlled by forward-looking progressive governments and by people who share the governments' commitment to economic and political development.

These two assumptions regarding the structure of the mass media give rise to an overwhelming faith in the positive role that mass communications can play in the process of development. Out of this arises the pecular situation where the mass media of underdeveloped countries are

invested with overwhelming powers to bring about social change but where the mass media of such developed countries as the United States, for example, are seen to be virtually ineffectual. Thus while Western scholars on home ground vehemently deny that mass communications has anything but a mere "reinforcing" effect, with respect to the third world they assert the very opposite. Similarly, whereas the mass media of developed countries are often attacked for being trivial and short-sighted, those of the underdeveloped countries are seen to be instruments' of wisdom, social responsibility and rationality. In the third world, Wilbur Schramm tells us, "the eyes of communications are always on the future."[1]

The source of this type of attitude is not hard to discover. Herbert Hyman intimates that the power of the new media of communications derives from their massiveness, their tendency to at once incorporate a whole nation as their clientale. According to him:[2]

> In the face of the challenge of rapidly modernizing many traditional societies around the world they (the mass media) are a major hope. As instruments of socialization, they are efficient and their sweep is vast enough to cover th huge population requiring modernization. Their standardization, a point of attack for many critics is the very thing suited for producing widespread national uniformities in patterns of behavior. (Italics mine)

The second component behind the positive evaluation of the mass media in underdeveloped contexts is the concept that they are primarily controlled by the government. On the basis of this assumption another scholar asserts that in the underdeveloped states.[3]

> Much of the content of all the media, including advertising, is informational, educational, or propagandistic in nature, designed to inform or persuade people about various kinds of modernization. (Italics mine)

The question that arises is: How representatives are these ideas about the structure of the mass media?

Taking India as an example of an underdeveloped country, it can be seen that the above representation of mass communications media is far from adequate. It holds true of only one type of mass medium, i.e., broadcasting, which is government-controlled, but leaves out of consideration the newspaper and periodical press and the film industry which are privately controlled and operated.

In the following attention is given only to the general outlines of the popular press.

As against the government owned and operated broadcasting media India has a sizeable newspaper and periodical press which in 1968 comprised a total of 10,019 publications. Of these 687 were "dailies" or publications which appeared over thrice a week and 9,332 periodicals. Government owned an extremely small part of this press.[4] Moreover, far from being controlled by metropolitan and cosmopolitan interests and orientations, the major portion of the popular press was dominated by "small" publications with "small" circulations, stemming from "small" towns, appealing to "small" audiences and occupied with less than national issues and themes. Large-scale publications with big circulation figures, originating from metropolitan cities, addressed to massive audiences and concerned with national view points and goals were in a minority.

The predominance of very small mass media is seen in the fact that the paper with the largest circulation in India is the Ananda Bazar Patrika which had a circulation of 211,131 copies in 1968.[5] This figure was less than that achieved by the 49th largest newspaper in the United States in 1971, i.e., the Indianapolis Star which currently has a circulation of 226,728 copies.[6] The predominance of small newspapers is further indicated by the fact that in 1967, 85.2 per cent of all publications in India had

circulation ranges of less than 5000 copies per issue. All told, 95.5 per cent of the newspaper and periodical press was comprised of "small" publications with circulations of less than 15,000 copies.[7]

A second feature of the popular press is that it is mainly centered in small provincial towns which suscribe to more parochial loyalties or orientations rather than metropolitan cities with their universalistic and cosmopolitan ethos. Of the total of 10,019 publications in 1968 only a littlerover one-third (3,435 or 34 per cent) came from the metropolitan centers of Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras whereas the vast majority (6,584 or 66 per cent) represented the output of state capitals and lesser towns in the provinces. Here again the tendency was less for the state capitals to dominate than for the lesser towns within each state. As Table one shows while state capitals accounted for 1,303 or 13 per cent of the publications, lesser towns in the provinces accounted for 5,281 or 53 per cent of the output of the popular press.

The showing of metropolitan cities is even weaker in the area of publications which are more frequently published, i.e., "dailies." As Table 1 shows, of the total of 687 dailies in 1968 only 130 or 19 per cent were metropolitan based. Another 130 or 19 per cent dailies stemmed from provincial capitals but the majority, 427 or 62 per cent dailies, were published from the lesser towns in the various states.

In addition to the fact that metropolitan areas account for less than 20 per cent of dailies, the interesting trend towards a shrinkage of the geographic spread of metropolitan-based daily newspapers should be noted. Thus, while in 1963 58.2 per cent of such dailies were consumed outside of metropolitan cities, in 1968 this proportion had dropped to 50.8 per cent.[8b] In other words, the more cosmopolitan

oriented daily newspapers published in metropolitan cities not only tend to be selelctively consumed within their area of origin but over the years this tendency to confine their circulation to such areas has intensified.

Another way of viewing the structure of mass communications media is by making a distinction between the English language press and the vernacular or Indian language press. In the highly diversified linguistic situation of India where there are some 14 major regional languages with sizeable populations ranging from 1.4 million to 123.0 million, English has served as a lingua franca uniting the educated intellegentsia from different language communities since the 19th century. The emergence of

	Dailies	Periodicals	Totals
Metropolitan	130 19%	3,305 35%	3,435 34%
State Capitals	130 19%	1,173 13%	1,303 13%
Provincial Towns	427 62%	4,854 52%	5,281 53%
Totals	687 100%	9,332 100%	10,019 100%

Dailies and Periodicals According to Place of Origin, 1968[8]

Table 1

Indian nationalism, the awareness of India as a corporate unity have been closely associated with the spread of English which has enabled people to transcend the narrow boundaries of their regional and language loyalties in order to unite in the cause of all-India aims and aspirations. In contrast, the spoken or vernacular languages of the country have been more closely associated with more insulated frameworks, the elaboration of regional sentiments, the segmental pride that separates the Bengali from the Punjabi and Hindi speaker.[9] Political leaders are often contrasted in their style and orientations according to their linguistic preferences. Thus national elites committed to more universal goals and criteria, to making choices depending on whether a particular measure advances the unity or economic growth of the nation as a whole rather than a parochial segment thereof, are primarily associated with English as the medium of their instruction and day to day operations. At the other end of the sprectrum are regional and local elites who lack profiency in English, have been educated and operate primarily in the vernaculars. These elites suscribe to sub-national goals and criteria. Their loyalties are owed mainly to region (North or South), their language groups, and below that to their caste or tribe. As compared to national elites, regional and local elites are less secular and are anti-intellectual.[10]

The classification of the popular press into "English" and "vernacular" covers the same broad distinction between political styles and orientations. English publications tend to be mainly metropolitan based, cosmopolitan in outlook, to concentrate on national issues, events, and criteria. Whereas the vernacular publications which are of necessity limited to narrow and less diversified audiences function like "locals."[11] In other words, vernacular publications concentrate on matters of regional and

local interest, tend to interpret national issues, and policies according to the political and economic interests of language community, caste, tribe etc.[12]

This distinction in the content and orientations of English and vernacular publications needs to be more carefully studied through content analyses. However, its relevance can be gauged from two types of evidence. First, the publications of sectarian and communal groups and organizations tend to be published mainly in the vernaculars. Thus journals maintained by caste associations, Hindu religio-cum-political organizations such as the Arya Sabha, the Militant R. S. S. and the Hindu Mahasabha, to name but a few, are primarily written in the vernaculars. Second, while English language publications tend to be mainly concentrated in metropolitan areas, vernacular publications tend to cluster around provincial capitals and small towns. As Table 2 below shows whereas the majority or 69 per cent of English publications in 1968 originated in metropolitan areas, the majority or 75 per cent of vernacular publications were issued from non-metropolitan areas. Moreover the vernacular publications tended to be predominantly centered in the lesser provincial towns. Whereas only 14 per cent of English language publications originated in towns with populations of 100,000 and above, 33 per cent of vernacular publications stemmed from such towns; and whereas towns with populations of less than 100,000 contributed only 5 per cent of English newspapers and periodicals, they produced as much as 29 per cent of the vernacular publications.

	English Language	Vernacular Language	Totals
Metropolitan	1,429 69%	2,000 25%	3,435 34%
State Capital	252 12%	1,051 13%	1,303 13%
Cities with Populations 100,000 and above	283 14%	2,618 33%	2,901 29%
Cities with Populations less than 100,000	110 5%	2,270 29%	2,380 24%
Totals	2,074 100%	7,945 100%	10,019 100%

English and Vernacular Publications According to Place of Origin 1968[13]

Table 2

The above table will have already anticipated the obvious point that vernacular publications outnumber those in English language in the ratio of almost 4:1. Whereas English language publications claimed 2,074 or 21 per cent of the total output of the popular press in 1968, those in the Indian languages comprised 7,945 or 79 per cent of all publications. In effect then, the non-cosmopolitan, provincial type of publication constituted the majority.

In passing it may be noted that the general tendency has been for the vernacular press to make steady gains over the English language press. This is the inevitable result of the spread of popular education which in India results in larger numbers becoming literate in the vernacular.[14] This trend is in consonance with the general pattern of socio-political change in India which has been characterized by an increasing decentralization of power. Through this process national elites brought up in predominantly English and western patterns of education, and suscribing to urbane and cosmopolitan norms, have progressively been replaced by regional elites who are more representative of the people and more closely approximate the segmented loyalties of the population whose orientations are more towards region, language and religious community, caste and tribe than to the nation.[15]

Conclusions

The preceding suggests that the structure of the mass communications systems of countries like India is much more complex than is projected by Western scholars. While the possible contributions of an engineered communications policy directed at changing attitudes, values and concepts as a means to advancing economic and political development are undeniable, the practical feasability of putting such policy into action is fraught with problems. It needs to be emphasized that the problem is not one of

scarcity of communications resources as has often been suggested by scholars like Wilbur Schramm and Ithiel de Sola Pool.[16] While the scarcity of newsprint, or transmitters or radios per head of the population impose limits on attempts to instrumentally use communications to affect development, a more serious obstacle arises from the fact the mass media are not under anything like the perfect control of either the government or of groups of individuals who are progressive and committed to the development of the national economy or its political institutions.

It was seen above, e.g., that the majority of Indian newspapers and periodicals tend to originate in small, provincial settings, to appeal to sub-national loyalties and commitments and to survive on the basis of the patronage offered by very small groups ranging in size from 5,000 to 15,000. In passing it was mentioned that in the age of mass communications, organizations like castes and chauvinistic religious groups have seized upon the opportunity to use this new technology to advance and crystallize the interests of sectarian and non-secular groups. The control over the mass media enjoyed by such groups imposes severe limits as to how change agents can utilize these media. Certainly the situation in which they are likely to find themselves will be far from uncompetitive. Challenges can be expected from groups that either oppose political and economic development or what is more likely, propose alternative programs leading to political and economical changes that are more likely to benefit parochial segments of the population rather than the nation as a whole. Thus the situation is at variance with that projected by many western communication scholars.

Footnotes

[1]Schramm, Wilbur, "Communication Development and the Development Process," in Lucian W. Pye (ed.) Communications and Political Development, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 41.

[2]Hyman, Herbert, "Mass Media and Political Socialization," in Lucian W. Pye (ed.) Communications and Political Development, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 42.

[3]McNelly, John T., quoted by Everett E. Rogers in Modernization Among Peasants, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969, p. 99.

[4]Press in India: 1969, Report of the Registrar of Newspapers for India. New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1969, p. 172. Government publications numbered 390 periodicals.

[5]Ibid., p. 335.

[6]New York Times Encyclopedia Alumanac, 1970, p. 493.

[7]Press in India: 1969, op. cit., p. 53.

[8]Ibid., p. 30.

[8b]Ibid., p. 150.

[9]Srinivas, Mysore N., Caste in Modern India, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962, pp.

[10]Harrison, Selig, India the Most Dangerous Decades, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960, pp. 55-78.

[11]Murty, Nadig Krishna, Indian Journalism, Mysore: University of Mysore, 1966, p. 222.

[12]Harrison, Selig, India the Most Dangerous Decades, pp. 85-86; Report of the Indian Press Commission, Part II, New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1954, p. 202.

[13]Press in India: 1969, op. cit., p. 30.

[14]Harrison, Selig, India the Most Dangerous Decades, op. cit., p. 84. The gains made by the vernacular press can be gauged from the fact that between 1902 and 1968 the overall strength of the English language newspaper press has dropped. In 1902 English newspapers constituted 20 per cent of publications in this category, in 1968, they constituted only 9 per cent of total newspapers in India. See The Imperial Gazetteer, Vol. IV, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908, p. 452; The Press in India: 1969, op. cit., p. 3.

[15]Gusfield, Joseph R., "Political Community and Group Interests in Modern India," Pacific Affairs, 28,2, Summer 1965, 123-141.

[16]Pool, Ithiel de Sola, "The Mass Media and Politics in the Modernization Process," in Lucian W. Pye (ed.) Communications and Political Development, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963, pp. 237-238, 24]-247; Schramm, Wilbur, "Communication and Change," in Daniel Lerner and Wilbur Schramm (eds.) Communication and Change in Developing Countries, Honolulu: East-West Center Pressm University of Hawaii, 1969, pp. 8-9.